

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00
NSAE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-10 L-03 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 /073 W
-----115518 221220Z /13

O 221130Z FEB 78

FM AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0518

INFO USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY OTTAWA IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY PARIS IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY BONN IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY VIENNA IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY OSLO IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY BERN IMMEDIATE

USMISSION GENEVA IMMEDIATE

AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L PRETORIA 0995

LONDON ALSO FOR MOOSE

CAPE TOWN ALSO FOR EMBASSY

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PDIP, PEPR, PINT, SF, US

SUBJECT: DIPLOMATIC CORPS INVITED TO ROBBEN ISLAND

1. MEMBERS OF DIPLOMATIC AND CONSULAR CORPS LAST FRIDAY
(FEB. 17) RECEIVED DIRCULAR NOTE FROM DFA INVITING HEADS OF
MISSIONS TO VISIT ROBBEN ISLAND PRISON DURING THE FIRST WEEK
OF MARCH. INVITATION EMPHASIZED FACT THAT THIS WAS TO BE A
"GROUP VISIT." NOTE REQUIRES A REPLY ONLY IF INVITATION IS
TO BE ACCEPTED.

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2. AUSTRIAN AMBASSADOR CALLED ON ME YESTERDAY AFTERNOON TO
ASCERTAIN MY VIEWS ON THIS EXTRAORDINARY INVITATION.
HE TOLD ME THAT, WHILE DEAN OF DIPLOMATIC CORPS HAD
TAKEN NO ACTION TO ASCERTAIN DETAILS, ANOTHER MEMBER
HAD ASKED CHIEF OF PROTOCOL FOR PARTICULARS. PROTOCOL
HEAD GROBLER IS REPORTED TO HAVE SAID:

A) TENTATIVE DATE FOR TRIP IS THURSDAY, MARCH 2;
B) HE UNDERScored "GROUP" NATURE OF VISIT AND INDICATED THAT SEPARATE ACTIVITIES BY INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS OF CORPS NOT CONTEMPLATED;
C) GROUP WAS TO BE FLOWN TO ROBBEN ISLAND (PRESUMABLY BY SADF HELICOPTER);
D) LUNCH WAS TO BE PROVIDED AT THE PRISON;
E) IF ENOUGH ACCEPTANCES RECEIVED, MINISTER OF JUSTICE AND COMMISSIONER OF PRISONS JIMMY KRUGER WOULD CONSIDER ACCOMPANYING GROUP.

3. SOME MEMBERS OF CORPS (BRITISH AND CANADIAN AMBASSADORS) ARE SOMEWHAT ATTRACTED BY THIS OFFER ALTHOUGH THEY HAVE NOT RPT NOT MADE ANY DECISION WITH REGARD TO IT. THEY HAVE ADVANCED THE CONSIDERATIONS THAT TO MAKE THE VISIT WOULD (1) DEMONSTRATE INTEREST IN THE PRISONERS AND OUR CONCERN FOR THEIR WELFARE, AND (WL PREVENT THE SAG FROM BLAMING THE CORPS FOR HAVING TURNED DOWN AN OPPORTUNITY TO VISIT THE PLACE AND PEOPLE ON WHICH THEIR GOVERNMENTS EXPRESS SO MUCH CONCERN. FRENCH AMBASSADOR TOLD ME HE IS OPPOSED TO VISIT AND HAS ALREADY SENT THE NOTE TO THE ARCHIVES. AUSTRIAN AMBASSADOR IS ALSO VERY MUCH AGAINST THE TRIP.

4. TO MY MIND THE DISADVANTAGES OF A VISIT UNDER THE SAG TERMS WOULD FAR OUTWEIGH THE ADVANTAGES. FOR EXAMPLE, THERE
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IS NO INDICATION THAT WE COULD TALK TO INDIVIDUAL PRISONERS UNDER CONDITIONS OF OUR CHOOSING. WHATEVER THE GROUND RULES, THE PRISONERS THEMSELVES MIGHT WELL NOT WELCOME A VISIT BY THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS AT THE PROMPTING OF, AND UNDER THE AUSPICES OF, THE SAG. IT WOULD BE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR SOUTH AFRICAN PROPAGANDA EXPLOITATION. THE PRESS AND TV CAMERAMEN WILL NO DOUBT BE ALONG AND THE PROSPECT OF BEING QUESTIONED BY JOURNALISTS ABOUT OUR IMPRESSIONS IS NOT ATTRACTIVE. MUCH LESS ATTRACTIVE IS THE PROSPECT OF BEING PHOTOGRAPHED WITH KRUGER ON ROBBEN ISLAND. WITH A LEADING NAMIBIAN DISSIDENT, TOIVIO, AND SEVERAL OF HIS COLLEAGUES IMPRISONED THERE, THE VISIT COULD WELL BE MISINTERPRETED BY SWAPO. FURTHERMORE, A GROUP VISIT TO ROBBEN ISLAND IS HARDLY AN APPROPRIATE ACTIVITY FOR THE CORPS CONSIDERING THAT THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS MAKES ANNUAL VISITS AND IS IN A MUCH BETTER POSITION TO ASSESS AND REPORT ON ITS FINDINGS. I ALSO HAVE IN MIND THAT LAST YEAR THE SOUTH AFRICAN PRESS WAS TREATED TO A CONDUCTED TOUR OF THE PRISON AND SAW NOTHING MORE THAN THOSE SECTIONS OF THE PHYSICAL PLANT WHICH THE GOVERNMENT WANTED THEM TO SEE AND PHOTOGRAPH.

5. UNLESS INSTRUCTED OTHERWISE, I DO NOT PLAN TO

RESPOND TO THE INVITATION. I THINK THIS WILL BE STANCE
OF MOST OF MY COLLEAGUES. DEPARTMENT MAY WISH TO CONSIDER
ALTERNATIVE OF TRYING TO PERSUADE THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS TO
GO BACK TO DFA COLLECTIVELY WITH REQUEST THAT WE BE ALLOWED
TO SEE THOSE PRISONERS WE SELECT UNDER CONDITIONS OF OUR
CHOOSING, ONE OF WHICH WOULD BE THAT THIS BE STRICTLY
A PRIVATE VISIT WITH NO PRESS OR PICTURE-TAKING ALLOWED.
THIS WOULD BE NO SMALL TASK CONSIDERING THAT THE SWISS DEAN
WILL PROBABLY NOT WANT TO TAKE THE INITIATIVE AND WE WOULD
END UP HAVING TO DO IT OURSELVES WITH AN ASSIST FROM OUR
WESTERN ALLIES. ASSUMING WE COULD ACHIEVE CONSENSUS ON THIS
APPROACH, THE SAG WOULD PROBABLY TURN THE REQUEST DOWN.
WE WOULD THEN HAVE SUCCEEDED AT LEAST IN SHIFTING THE
MONKEY TO THEIR BACK.
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